

Dichotomy between knowledge and wisdom

The term “knowledge-based economy” may sound slightly awkward, as the actions taken by civilised human beings have always been based on knowledge. Still, over the past several decades, the term has grown to one of the key slogans which are very characteristic of today’s world. Today, knowledge has become a kind of universal “processing machine” and the genesis of such enterprises as the Google search engine or the Facebook social-networking service has proven that the operational capacity of this machine is measureless.

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IN THE TIMES OF CIVILISATION OF knowledge, the growing dichotomy between knowledge and wisdom appears to be one of the most embarrassing characteristics of today’s world. José Ortega y Gasset put it in a crude way in his work entitled *La Rebelión de las masas (The Revolt of the Masses)*: “It is a distinctive feature of our times that those of commonplace and mediocre minds, although aware of their mediocrity, have the courage to stand for their right to be commonplace and mediocre, and impose these features onto others.” There is more than enough evidence to the fact that “these times” have not gone by.

Although scientific and technological progress has been enormous, and our knowledge is constantly growing, we are still incapable of transforming this knowledge into social welfare in a satisfactory way. Today, when changes are becoming more and more dynamic, knowledge is growing old at a relatively fast pace, and if it is used in an improper way, or it is ill-managed, knowledge may become a short route to disaster.

The lack of wisdom results in global imbalance in the fields of ecology, economics, demography, and politics. It may be easily observed in the constantly-growing gap between the rich and poor. Social imbalance results in deviation, crime, terrorism, and, in extreme cases, even wars. Ecological imbalance may be observed in our everyday lives in the forms of water or air contamination. All these make our lives considerably less comfortable,

and paradoxically, the problem concerns mainly rich countries, although the level of their gross domestic product (GDP), which reflects the level of the wealth of a country, is growing. It means then, that wealth does not guarantee protection against the consequences of distorting balance, especially ecological balance, but the degradation of the natural environment results in ecological depreciation and dispossession. The thoughtless pursuit of wealth, and uncontrolled consumerism, are two of the primary reasons for the growing imbalance.

The reckless application of knowledge leads to the malfunctioning of democracy and the law, and the proliferation of laws. Democracy, law, and living according to the rules of law and order used to be, but no longer are, considered synonyms. Hyperdemocracy and hyperliberalism may, in extreme cases, result in their opposites – authoritarian regimes and monopolies, and consequently in the violation of economic market competition order. This changeability and complexity of legal regulations have made them much more “lenient.” Legal regulations are over-detailed and therefore each change of economic reality necessitates amendments of these regulations.

Although it is believed that in the days of the paradigm of the knowledge-based economy, this type of economy “means everything to us, then, at the same time, as a result of rapid changes, it may easily become nothing.” Life cycles of knowledge



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are constantly getting shorter, while simultaneously human life cycles are becoming longer. This is the reason why knowledge is becoming more and more undemocratic, differentiating entities and their opportunities. Our knowledge-based civilisation is flooding the unprepared, whose numbers are on the rise, and adds to the workload of those who are highly-qualified, which increasing the number of unemployed.

This malfunctioning in the field of knowledge application has long been the subject of many analyses and articles, the number of which has grown significantly after the global crisis that started in the USA at the turn of 2007 and 2008. Economists are also being blamed for misreading Adam Smith and claiming that participating in the economic market exempts its participants from considering the questions of morality. If pursuing your own egoistic goals – guided by an invisible hand – will result in social welfare and “the wealth of the nations”, then “everything we should care about and everything we should do is to make sure we are acting in our interest.”

The magnitude of the imbalance and its complex global consequences result in the lack of convincing concepts and strategies for solving the problem. The question of strategy and models of an economic system that would act in favour of social rationalisation remains open. Despite many theoretical disputes concerning the economic system, the rule of a competitive economic order remains unquestionable. At the same time, however, the tenets of free market economics and free market competition result in its perversions and limitations. Entities being over-confrontational on the market may lead to undesirable phenomena and threats, especially as “the border between competition and destruction is nearly invisible.”

Unfortunately we have more than enough evidence that the line separating destruction and knowledge may also become invisible, and if we wish our knowledge not to be used in a destructive way then it must be accompanied by wisdom.

In the light of the above, the demand to turn the paradigm of a knowledge-based economy into the paradigm of a wisdom-based economy appears fully justified. This demand was suggested by Prof. Antoni Kukliński during the Forum on Strategic Thinking organised by the Polish Economic Society, and the question of the wisdom-based economy will be discussed during the First Congress on Polish Strategic Thought, also organised by the Polish Economic Society. More Information is available on http://www.pte.pl/pliki/pdf/Biuletyn_2_2011.pdf ::